

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 295 745

PS 017 403

TITLE Primary Education in Sweden. Project No. 8:
Innovation in Primary Education.

INSTITUTION Council for Cultural Cooperation, Strasbourg
(France).

REPORT NO DECS/EGT-84-105-rev

PUB DATE 22 Apr 88

NOTE 10p.; For related documents on the Council for
Cultural Co-operation (CDCC) Project No. 8 on
"Innovation in Primary Education", see PS 017 402-406
and PS 017 415-417.

PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.

DESCRIPTORS Attendance; Class Size; *Educational Change;
Educational Cooperation; Educational Objectives;
Educational Trends; *Elementary School Curriculum;
Family School Relationship; Foreign Countries;
*Primary Education; Program Descriptions; *Public
Schools; School Administration; *School Organization;
School Schedules; Student Evaluation; Teacher
Education; Teaching Methods; Welfare Services

IDENTIFIERS *Sweden

ABSTRACT

This report provides an overview of primary education in Sweden. Briefly described are: (1) the reform of teacher training in Sweden; (2) the organization of the comprehensive school; (3) public school attendance; (4) school schedules; (5) curriculum; (6) student evaluation; (7) curriculum goals; (8) school responsibilities; (9) current problems in Swedish primary education; (10) educational trends; (11) reform of the state school administration; (12) the number of comprehensive schools and teachers in Sweden and mean class sizes; (13) instructional methods; (14) in-service teacher training; (15) school welfare activities; (16) social welfare enterprises, including day-homes, nursery schools, kindergartens, and corresponding preschool care institutions; (17) cooperation between preschools and primary education; and (18) cooperation and communication between homes and schools. (RH)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED295745

COUNCIL
OF EUROPE



CONSEIL
DE L'EUROPE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

DECS/EGT (84) 105 rev.

Project No. 8:
"Innovation in primary education"

Primary education in Sweden

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Council of
Europe

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 017403

Strasbourg 22 April 1988

DECS/EGT (84) 105 rev.

COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION

Project No. 8 - Innovation in primary education

PRIMARY EDUCATION IN SWEDEN

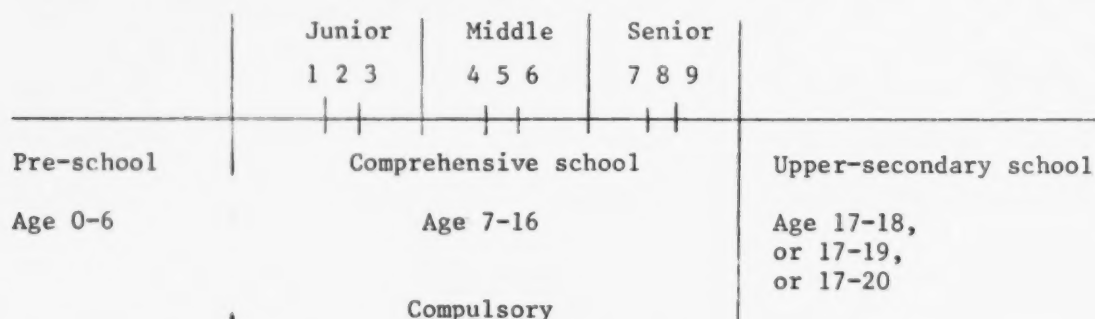
submitted by
the Swedish authorities

Primary education in Sweden is a part of the compulsory comprehensive nine-year school which was established in 1962. The municipalities are mandated to offer pre-school to all children at the age of six but pre-school is voluntary. Compulsory schooling starts at the age of seven.

Teacher training in Sweden will be reformed from the academic year 1988/89. Teachers for the comprehensive school will then be trained for teaching either in grades 1-7 or in grades 4-9 (overlapping each other in four grades). The first category will teach almost all subjects in grades 1-3 but then concentrate on fewer subjects. The second category will teach more subjects than the senior level teachers of today do.

The comprehensive school has two three-year levels of primary education - the junior level (grades 1-3) and the middle level (grades 4-6) - and a third lower-secondary level - the senior level (grades 7-9). The first two levels have a system with class-teachers who teach almost all subjects. At the senior level teachers specialised for generally two or three subjects each are used. Subjects as music, arts, physical education etc at the senior level and often at the middle level are taught by teachers specialised in only one of the subjects each.

Figure 1. School structure in Sweden.



Almost all children in Sweden attend the public comprehensive school. Private schools are very rare in Sweden though the Education Act is liberal towards private persons or groups wanting to establish private schools. Less than 1% of the children attend private schools.

The school year starts at the end of August and ends in mid-June. It comprises 40 weeks (Monday-Friday) and is divided into two terms, called the autumn term (20 August - 20 December) and the spring term (10 January - 10 June). The exact dates vary from one school year to the next and are not the same in all school districts.

The time schedule gives the total sum of periods per week (one period = 40 minutes) for the level as a whole. Each school has to decide its own distribution of periods over the three grades of each level. The local school-board has the right to adjust the time schedule over the limits of the levels. That right is used almost only to postpone the start of learning English from grade 3 to grade 4. In grade 1 there are 20 periods per week (ppw), in grade 2 24 ppw and in grade 3 30 ppw. In the rest of the grades there are 33-34 ppw.

Table 1. Time schedule of the comprehensive school.

Subject	Junior	Middle	Senior
English	2	10	9 ²
Physical education	6	9	9
Mathematics	13	15	12 ²
Music	4	5	2
Oriental subjects ¹	18	21	32
Social orientation subjects	-	(15)	(17)
Nature orientation subjects	-	(6)	(15)
Handicrafts	2	9	5
Swedish	29	26	12
Drawing		6	5
Domestic science		1	4
Child care			1
Options			11 ³
Total	74	102	102

1. Oriental subjects are at the middle and the senior levels divided into two groups, the social orientation subjects (geography, history, knowledge of religion and social sciences) and the nature orientation subjects (biology, physics, chemistry and technology).
2. The pupils have a choice between a common and a special course in English and mathematics at the senior level.
3. Either a three-year course in French or German or locally decided courses - at least one term long. Immigrant children can also choose their home languages as options.

In the comprehensive school there are no examinations. Regardless of options a complete nine-year school course qualifies for studies in the upper-secondary school on any of the subjects. Marks are given in grade 8 and grade 9 at the end of each term in all subjects with five as the highest and one as the lowest degree. The main reason for the marks is that they form the basis for admission to the upper-secondary education, when there are more students wanting to follow a given specialisation there than there are places for.

In 1980 the Riksdag (parliament) passed the government bill on a new curriculum for the nine-year comprehensive school. That curriculum is in force since the school year 1982/83.

The meaning of the word «curriculum» differs from one nation to another. In Sweden the «formal» curriculum consists of three parts:

- goals and guidelines;
- syllabuses for subjects or groups of subjects;
- time schedule.

The general goal for the comprehensive school is set out in the first paragraph of the Education Act: «The purpose of the education which society provides for children and young persons is to impart knowledge to the pupils and to develop their skills and, in co-operation with their homes, to promote their development into harmonious individuals and into competent and responsible members of society.»

The opening sentences of the goal chapter in the curriculum say: «Compulsory school is a part of society. The curriculum reflects the view of the democracy on society and man, the implication being that human beings are active and creative and that they both can and must assume responsibility and seek knowledge in order to co-operate with others in understanding and improving their own living conditions and those of other people. The content and the working methods must be designed in such a way that they promote this attitude towards people and society. It is the duty of schools to give their pupils increased responsibility and powers of co-determination as they grow older and become increasingly mature.»

The goals and the guidelines are formulated in general terms. They are thus not measurable, and they express rather a direction for the work of schools than what schools shall attain.

In the syllabuses for subjects or group of subjects goals for the work in these subjects or areas are also expressed. They have to be read parallelly with the general goals and guidelines. The goals of the subjects are also formulated in rather general terms. The syllabuses contain beside goals also main items of the subjects for each of the three levels of the comprehensive school - also fairly generally expressed.

The curriculum also includes extensive commentaries to support local development work. These commentaries are going to be published, revised and updated on a continuous basis. They do not include any regulations as such. Instead they are intended to describe current problems and difficulties as experienced by people working in schools, and on this basis to discuss alternative methods of tackling these problems and difficulties and working in the direction indicated by the goals laid down for schools. Experience and research findings will successively be fed back into revised version of the commentaries, and various goal conflicts are elucidated.

According to the curriculum each school (1) has to make a plan for its work. This local plan shall reflect the aims and the ambitions of the school. It can be seen as a development programme and a form of local curricular work. A catalogue of problems should be the basis for the plan. There is naturally not any standardised structure for the local plans, and the experiences from the first year show great differences between those local plans.

At first hand current problems in the Swedish comprehensive school are seen at the senior level, but there are of course problems in the primary education too.

In Sweden as in many other western industrialised countries there are problems with truancy, drop-outs, vandalism etc. A report claiming that 8% of the pupils do not complete their compulsory schooling has caused a discussion whether the figure is too high or not, but nevertheless there are pupils who leave school without having reached a level of knowledge and skills that they need in spite of the fact that substantial efforts with compensatory teaching are made. Experiences show that some effect in trying to solve these problems has come out of increasing the responsibility and influence of the pupils in school.

For a few years now Swedish school authorities have paid extra attention to the situation for children's school start. A number of schools have had the opportunity to receive an extra state grant for local development work at junior level. This drive has mainly been concentrated on co-operation between pre-schools and comprehensive schools, higher quality in teaching basic skills and co-operation between the school and parents. The extra state grant is as from the present school year aimed at the middle level and especially teaching in Swedish and mathematics.

The policy of migrant education has the objective that migrant children will develop a bilingual competence mastering both their home-languages and Swedish. The majority of the immigrant children are individually integrated in ordinary Swedish classes, but when there are many migrant children of the same origin in a school at the junior and the middle level they often form bilingual classes called home-language classes or classes with one half Swedish-speaking children and one half speaking another language. In those classes the home-language is the dominating language of instruction in the lower grade, but gradually Swedish takes over as language of instruction.

Democratisation, increased effectiveness in the studies, a deeper responsibility towards pupils with difficulties and handicaps and decentralisation are the main trends in the reformation of the comprehensive school. Both the new curriculum and other rules are expressions of those aims. You can also find that basic skills are more stressed in the current curriculum.

In order to support the implementation of the new curriculum there has been in-service training for headmasters and deputy headmasters for many years. Another support was a special state grant during a period of four years

(1) School is here seen as the administrative unit - one or more schools administrated by one headmaster.

to all schools - the two years before the at that time new curriculum and the first two years when it is in force. That has enabled groups of teachers to make preparatory work in their schools.

The reform of comprehensive schooling had a parallel in a reform of the state school administration from the fiscal year 1982/83. The division of roles can be described as follows:

- The central political level (the government and parliament) lays down the goals and guidelines, indicates frameworks in which these goals are to be realised and decides on financial resources.
- The central administrative level (the National Board of Education) has the general responsibility of advice and control of the realisation of the goals and provides a basis for change in these goals and strategies.
- The regional administrative level (the County Board of Education) is responsible for the development, co-ordination and planning in the county and has the regional responsibility of advice and control of the realisation of the goals and guidelines.

In the municipalities the local education boards are responsible for the «day-to-day» administration of the activities of schools and for the development of education activities paying regard to plans and development aid from the state authorities.

The number of comprehensive schools in Sweden is comparatively high but many of the schools in sparsely populated areas are small. In the 284 municipalities there are approximately 1,400 school districts (administered by one headmaster each) with approximately 4,700 schools.

The number of pupils in the comprehensive school has been diminishing from 1,037,700 in 1979/80 to 914,000 in 1987/88, but as from 1986 the birth rate is increasing.

Table 2. Number of pupils in the comprehensive school.

1980/81	1981/82	1984/85	1987/88
1,026,100	1,012,700	958,000	914,000

The number of teachers in the comprehensive school is approximately 92,000 (1987/88).

The mean class sizes in 1983/84 were at the junior level 20.5, at the middle level 23.1 and at the senior level 26.6.

A substantial part of the teaching takes place in smaller groups thanks to the fact that approximately 25% of the state grants are distributed per capita and can be used for mainly two purposes: extra support to pupils with difficulties and teaching in smaller groups to facilitate individualisation. The pupil-teacher ratio in the comprehensive school is approximately 10.

There is a new system in force from the fiscal year 1982/83 for in-service training of teachers. The municipalities get state grants for local development work; 60-80% of that state grant shall be used for in-service training. The training is arranged mainly as university courses. The local boards of education decide who can participate. 20-40% can be used for different kinds of development work in accordance to local needs. In-service training can be a part also of that development work.

The school welfare activities can be looked upon at two levels, the work being done in the everyday life of school and the work carried out by specialists.

At the first level every teacher has the responsibility, and the work is mainly of preventive nature but it also includes extra attention for pupils with difficulties of different kinds. In units of generally two or three classes the planning of school welfare activities is integrated in the planning of the rest of the daily work.

At the second level the headmaster, the school nurse, the school doctor, the school psychologist and the school social worker form a team (the pupils welfare team) within which planning is done for the cases that cannot be handled at the first level.

The establishment of day-homes, nursery schools, kindergartens and corresponding pre-school care institutions has predominantly been seen as a social welfare enterprise. Centrally and usually also locally, pre-school institutions are managed by the boards of health and social welfare and not by the boards of education. Compulsory school does not start until the age of seven. An earlier start has long been discussed. In 1973 parliament decided to retain seven as the starting age, but also that pre-school should be available for all children of six («common pre-school year»). The issue of earlier school start was investigated by a governmental committee some years ago but no change has as yet been proposed by the Government.

The treatment of pre-school care and education as primarily a social question has given Swedish pre-school institutions some specific features. They are run mainly by municipal authorities. They have a low child/adult ratio (seldom more than six or seven). They also have a special responsibility for children with difficulties and special needs (for instance migrant children).

The responsibility of the local municipalities for pre-school care and education was not laid down by law until 1967. The establishment of pre-school institutions had come late and is so far incomplete.

Co-operation between pre-schools and primary education is expanding. Experiments have been made with a total integration of children at the age of six to the age of nine. The experiences are positive. The problems are caused mainly by the fact that pre-school and comprehensive school belong to different administrative systems. How co-operation could be promoted is also a matter for the governmental committee mentioned above.

Co-operation between homes and schools can be enlightened by quoting the curriculum:

«The primary and principal responsibility for a pupil's care and upbringing rests with the home. School activities must support the home in its provision of an upbringing shaped according to the fundamental democratic values of our society. It can be very important for differences regarding norms and opinions on various questions to be discussed between schools and parents, so as to resolve any clashes that may occur.»

«Experience has shown that it is difficult to establish contact with all parents. In this case, schools themselves must take active measures to get in touch with the parents concerned and to establish the necessary co-operation.»

«Parental contacts with a school should not be confined to a couple of occasions per year. Schools are also duty bound throughout pupils' school career to keep their parents informed of matters concerning the organisation of compulsory schooling, the curriculum and working methods, and the further education opportunities of career opportunities which are available.»